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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004755

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SUBJECT: DIYALA: THE ISSUES, LEADERS, POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Summary: Diyala is a mixed Province. Although the Sunni represent a majority, they are underrepresented in the Provincial Government due to their boycott of the January 2005 provincial elections. With a Shi'a minority government trying to exert control over a Sunni-supported insurgency, the provincial government is unable to pursue its goals and programs. The situation has been exacerbated by Kurdish expansion into northern areas of the province. New provincial elections could relieve some pressure. A change in military and police leadership, perceived as highly sectarian, may also help. This is one of a series of cables issued by the US Embassy Baghdad in conjunction with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams addressing the questions of what are the issues, who are the key players, and what are possible steps forward for security and stability. End Summary.

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POLITICAL ISSUES  
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¶2. (SBU) Diyala is a mixed and complicated province comprised of significant Sunni, Shia, Kurdish and Turkmen populations. While Sunni Arabs comprise a majority within Diyala province, they boycotted the last provincial elections and as a result have only 14 out of 41 provincial council seats. Within the Shia Alliance on the Provincial Council SCIRI and Badr dominate, although there are a number of Dawa party and independent Shia politicians. Sunni politicians tend to be members of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), while PUK and KDP are both represented within the Provincial Council,s Kurdish Alliance.

¶3. (C) Diyala,s governor as well as the Provincial Iraqi Police (IP) Commander and Iraqi Army (IA) Commander are all Shia, a fact which has heightened sectarian tensions as Sunnis feel increasingly marginalized in provincial government. Combined with Sunni political disenchantment is an increasing belief among Diyala residents from all backgrounds that the provincial government is not working in their best interests and is unable to counteract increasing violence.

¶4. (C) Complicating matters further is the issue of Kurdish expansion into areas within Diyala province. Diyala,s two northern districts, Kifri and Khanaqin, have long been Kurdish strongholds with many resources and even local services provided by neighboring Sulaymaniyah province. It has been anticipated that these two districts might try to hold referendums as defined in Article 140 of the Iraqi

Constitution and vote to annex themselves to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Recently, the KRG through its draft constitution has claimed lands further south in Diyala in areas which have not traditionally been Kurdish.

15. (C) With a Shia-minority, backed by high level Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police commanders, trying to exert control over a Sunni-majority population supporting the insurgency and a Kurdish population determined to push forward its own agenda, the provincial government is unable to move forward with its goals and programs.

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ECONOMIC ISSUES  
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16. (C) Diyala,s economy has historically been agrarian based, with other business enterprises primarily located in Baqubah, the provincial capital. Economic diversification has always been a problem, although with Diyala,s deteriorating security situation it has been even more difficult to encourage investment and rebuild existing businesses. The movement of goods into and out of the province has also been severely affected by the security situation leading shortages of essential items. Unemployment continues to be a problem especially among male youths. There is insufficient and unstable electricity which makes it difficult to power industry, business or agriculture, further crippling Diyala,s economy. Problems of corruption have hindered Diyala reconstruction efforts and increased Diyala residents, mistrust of local government officials. While there have been reconstruction projects within Diyala, identifying priorities and distributing the money is often

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based on a spoils system which increases sectarian tensions.

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SECURITY  
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17. (C) Diyala is situated in the center of Iraq sharing a border with Iran and Baghdad, Salah ad Din, Sulaymaniyah and Wasit provinces. It is a former Baathist stronghold with a strong Al Qaeda-Iraq (AQI) presence; former AQI leader al-Zarqawi was killed in June 2006 in Baquba, Diyala Province. Sunni Arab insurgents continue to attack both Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Increasingly, Shia militias from Baghdad have entered into Diyala, including Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), a militia affiliated with extremist Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr. There is strong evidence suggesting Iran is taking advantage of the long and poorly protected border to supply material and possibly manpower to Shia militias in and through Diyala. Kurdish territorial ambitions in northern Diyala have increased sectarian tensions as Sunni Arabs resist what they consider Kurdish effort to annex Diyala districts into the Kurdish region.

18. (C) In addition to the previously mentioned elements, there have been repeated charges of abuse by Diyala,s Shia military and police commanders. Their sectarian agendas, coupled with abuse allegations, have enflamed sectarian tensions in an already volatile environment.

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KEY POLITICAL PLAYERS  
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19. (C) Governor Ra,ad Rasheed al-Timimi (Shia) is the most prominent Da,wa Party member in the Provincial government. He is generally regarded as relatively non-sectarian, although he has been hesitant to take action against ISF Commanders who have demonstrated sectarian agendas and been accused of abusing detainees.

¶10. (C) Ali Majeed Subruk al-Awsi (Shia) is the leading SCIRI representative on the Provincial Council. There are rumors that if the current governor leaves, al-Awsi will be nominated to replace him.

¶11. (C) Ghassan al-Bawi (Shia) is the provincial police chief and SCIRI party member. He has powerful connections in Baghdad, has been accused of corruption and widespread abuse of detainees.

¶12. (C) Auwf Rahumi al Rubai,i (Sunni Arab) is the provinces Deputy Governor from the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). He is one of three people controlling reconstruction projects and funds, including Iraqi Development Funds. Al-Ruba,i comes from Muqadiyah from the center of the province. .

¶13. (C) Sheikh. Hassan al-Mullah Ali al-Qaragholli (Sunni Arab) is a spiritual leader and head of the Sunni endowment (Waqf) in Diyala. He has considerable influence throughout the province although he is currently under arrest for suspicion of AQI activities.

¶14. (C) The mayor of Baquba, Khaled al Sanjery (Sunni Arab), is possibly the single most powerful politician in the Province. Strongly in favor of a peaceful solution to current problems but also has strong connections to former Ba,athists. .

¶15. (C) Ibrahim Bajillan, the Provincial Council chairman is regarded as a mouthpiece for Iraqi President and PUK leader, Jalal Talibani. The Provincial Council is regarded as ineffective, and while Bajilan is not the sole source of the Council,s problems, he has not taken concrete steps to address the problems. He has been repeatedly accused of corruption.

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COMMENT: POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD  
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¶16. (C) Security remains Diyala,s key challenge, complicated by the various elements enflaming sectarian tensions and pursuing disparate agendas. While countering the AQI element will require joint CF-ISF operations,

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combating the Sunni insurgents, Baathists, Shia militias, and criminal elements will require political as well as military solutions. One of the immediate ways to address Sunni marginalization within provincial politics is new provincial elections. Assuming the Sunnis do not boycott future elections, they would undoubtedly increase their number of seats while Shia Arabs would see their numbers decrease. This change in the balance of power could lead to more active involvement in the political process from all members of Diyala,s Sunni Arabs, including former Baathists and some involved in the insurgency. In order for elections to occur, the Council of Representatives (CoR) must pass the Independent High Electoral Commission Law and eventually the Provincial Powers Law.

¶17. (C) Another immediate way to diffuse increasing sectarian tensions is the removal of the IA and IP Commanders in Diyala, as long as they are replaced with professionals who do not have a sectarian agenda. Diyala,s Governor appears to support, at least to some degree, the removal of the IP Commander Ghassan, although he has been concerned that some of the replacements suggested by the central government have been equally sectarian. Continued assistance, both technical and operational, by CF will be required until ISF can demonstrate to Diyala,s residents that they are not targeting one group over another.

¶18. (C) Finally, investment in key infrastructure and

development of the Mansuriya/Hamrin gas field will be  
critical to rebuilding and diversifying Diyala,s economy.  
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